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Reagan's military budget draws fire on Capitol Hill

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WASHINGTON — The new chairman of the House Armed Services Committee served notice on President Reagan yesterday that the administration could have serious trouble getting full funding in Congress for the two keystones of its military budget — the "Star Wars" anti-missile program and the MX missile.

Rep. Les Aspin (D., Wis.) also strongly suggested that he personally might favor cuts in funding for the largest single weapons-system item in the budget, the B-1 bomber.

Aspin told reporters after hearing testimony from Defense Secretary Caspar W. Weinberger that "it is likely that Congress will reduce" the budget for the space-based Star Wars system — possibly radically.

"The talk is of a \$200 million to \$400 million" increase in research funds, he said. Reagan has asked for a \$2.3 billion increase in the current appropriation of \$1.4 billion.

Reagan has made the drive to develop a Star Wars system, officially known as the Strategic Defense Initiative, a central element of a new defense strategy based on changing from a posture of mutual assured destruction through overwhelming offensive power to one of defense against intercontinental missiles.

Aspin also voiced reservations about the MX, a weapon whose funding he helped save for Reagan in a House showdown last year by fashioning a compromise that eventually was approved.

He noted that Weinberger had testified that approval of the MX was important as a sign of American strength in arms negotiations with the Soviet Union scheduled to open in Geneva next month. If the United States should give up the MX, Weinberger said, the Soviets would assume they would not have to make concessions in negotiations because this country would be "unilaterally disarming."

Aspin responded, "Just because there are talks going on doesn't mean that we must rubber-stamp their whole program."

Reagan has requested \$4 billion for the MX — which he calls the "Peace-keeper" — in his new budget, an increase of \$1.2 billion over the current year's appropriation.

The first three intercontinental MX missiles are scheduled to be deployed late next year. Weinberger said in testimony yesterday that the MX was "vital" to U.S. plans to offset growing Soviet missile power.

Aspin said in a speech last month that the "MX is no longer central to the negotiations" because the administration has begun to develop the Star Wars program. The Star Wars program would make a better bargaining chip in negotiations than would the MX, Aspin said, adding that the administration does not need both.

Aspin said that although he felt an outright freeze in military spending would be a "drastic step," he believed Congress would trim Reagan's proposed \$285.7 billion military

budget for fiscal 1986.

Aspin set the tone for the hearing by telling Weinberger, "Before we give you billions more, we want to know what you've done with the trillion you've got." He said hearings to try to answer that question would be scheduled.

On the B-1 bomber program, Aspin said he thought it might be "stretched out" to spread additional spending over a period of years, rendering unnecessary the approval of the full \$6.2 billion Reagan has requested for fiscal 1986, which begins Oct. 1.

Reagan has asked for funds to build 48 B-1s, the last planes in a fleet of 100.

Aspin was chosen to head the Armed Services Committee by fellow Democrats in early January in a move orchestrated by liberals seeking to give Democrats a more assertive image in the House.

Yesterday, in his first hearing as committee chairman, Aspin moved

quickly to demonstrate an independent spirit. He challenged an assertion Weinberger has made repeatedly in the last few days about studies suggesting that NATO countries have spent more on defense in recent years than have Warsaw Pact nations.

The studies have been cited by several Pentagon critics in questioning whether Reagan's massive military buildup is necessary. Weinberger told the Senate Armed Services Committee Monday, and repeated to the House committee yesterday, that Warsaw Pact spending was lower because Warsaw Pact nations relied on "slave labor."

Aspin, once a CIA analyst, told Weinberger that was incorrect because CIA studies attempt to account for the difference in the two political systems by assigning U.S. wage rates to Soviet and Warsaw Pact estimates.

"There may be reasons for the difference," Aspin said, "but slave labor is not one of them."